

# EXPLORING THE ENIGMA REGARDING LOCAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL INNOVATION IN SERVICE DELIVERY: THE CASE OF GHENT, BELGIUM

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the influence of the local governance system on the use of social innovation (SI) as service delivery tool. Social innovation has become an international trend, as it can help to improve public sector service delivery and achieve good governance by giving a more prominent role to citizens in the planning, design, delivery, evaluation and regulation of services (Jing and Gong, 2013:234; Pollit and Bouckaert, 2011:21). However, engaging in SI and having citizens play such a central role in service delivery has implications for the local governance systems of local governments (LG's). The enigma in this is that the pre-existing local governance system of a LG also posits implications for the use of SI as a service delivery tool. Nevertheless, how does this two-directional relation function in practice and what can we learn from it in terms of using SI as a service delivery tool? This paper reports the case study of the City of Ghent (East Flanders, Belgium) through a qualitative research design. Through interviews and focus groups, this case study sheds light on the actual practice, with the findings illustrating that the presence of a definitive influence of a local governance system on the use of SI during service delivery, does not exclusively influence the use of SI by the administration. Even so, this paper concludes that local governance systems play an influential role in the use of SI during local government service delivery. Of importance in this influence, is how SI can be positioned as part of the realm of exogenous power structures that influence the outcome of service delivery decision-making processes during local governance.

**Key words:** local government, local governance system, social innovation, citizen participation, service delivery, case study, Ghent

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The use of innovation in public sector service delivery, changes the norm pertaining to the actors and entities participating in the governance system that is used to provide public services with the aim to

meet the needs of the public better (Hartley, 2005; Mulgan and Albury, 2003; Osborne and Brown, 2005; Spacek, 2012 cited in *Merickova, Nemec and Svidronovci, 2015:523*). Moulaert and Nussbaumer (2008 cited in MacCallum, Moulaert, Hillier and Haddock, 2009:11), recognise these changes to the normative participation of actors in respect of the comprehensive transformations that occur in human practices and relations when SI is utilised during development. During SI these transformed relations, culminates in the participation of entities and actors amongst which citizens in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of public service delivery, by altering the traditional hierarchical governance relationship between government and citizens (Bekkers, Tummers Stuijzand, and Voorberg, 2013 cited in *Merickova, et al., 2015:522*). Social innovation further allows citizens and other societal actors to become instrumental in resolving societal problems in collaboration with government that the latter cannot solve on its own accord and resource frameworks.

The ability of local government to use SI towards facilitating citizen participation in service delivery and the governance of services appears to be influenced by the type of governance system that it employs and the extent to which the administration enforces it. However, the interaction between local governance systems and the use of SI during service delivery has not been researched extensively, which makes the enigma of their interaction important in view of the future use of SI by the public sector and specifically local government. Research that provides elucidation to this enigma surrounding local governance systems and SI could contribute to a better understanding of the impact that local governance systems might have on the use of SI in local government service delivery. Further, such research could contribute to the optimal utilisation of SI within the framework of certain local governance systems. Hence, the research question discussed in this paper is: how local governance systems might influence the use of SI as a tool for local government service delivery? Based on this question, the aim of this article is to illustrate how the use of SI as a tool for local government service delivery might be influenced by local governance systems. This is achieved through a discussion of the enigma concerning local governance systems in the first section. Successive to this the next section offers a discussion pertaining to the local governance and SI nexus during local government service delivery. This is followed by the research methodology section. Subsequently the case of Ghent offers findings as to how its local governance systems influences the use of SI as a service delivery tool. Following this discussion, lessons learnt from the case of Ghent and key explanatory factors that could help to build a conceptual framework to study SI in other settings and to help practitioners in designing a local SI-strategy is presented.

## **2. THE ENIGMA OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

In the context of this paper citizen participation in the local governance of service delivery denotes their participation in decision-making processes concerning the delivery and regulation of services through shared powers and responsibilities. A move to local governance necessitates local government to improve their functionality by becoming a provider of services, increasing the satisfaction of service users, developing good local governance, and empowering citizens to plan and manage their own affairs (Löffler, 2005: 169 cited in Öktem, 2014:753). Beyond the notions of governance namely being used for implementing policy decisions (Olimid, 2014:78; Andrews and Goldsmith, 2011 cited in Rodríguez-García and Yáñez, 2016:128), or for the purpose of service delivery decisions (Hassan and Taiwo, 2016:306), the grounding of local governance is in its multidimensional nature of participatory action and strategies, as well as citizen participation (Olimid, 2014:78). Nevertheless, the use of local governance during service delivery, which is the focus of this paper, appears to be embedded in (i) governance models adopted within public sector organisations, and (ii) power structure. The remainder of this section reflects on governance models and power structures as part of the enigma concerning the local governance of service delivery.

### **2.1 GOVERNANCE MODELS**

According to Georgescu (2014: 135-146 cited in Olimid, 2014:76) decision-making models adopted in a public sector organisation can either have a positive or negative influence on the participation and representation of citizens in decisions. The prevalence of this influence in public sector organisations such as local government is visible in the degree to which its governance system incorporates the participation of external stakeholders in decision-making processes pertaining to service delivery. Governance models emerge from the conglomeration of legal instruments that are used viz non-binding recommendations, conclusions and declarations, as well as binding requirements viz decisions, regulations and directives, and the associated procedures for the implementation of these binding and non-binding requirements which could either be rigid or flexible (Treib, Bähr and Falkner, 2005 cited in Monteiro, 2014:206). This infers that these binding and non-binding instruments provide structure for the type of governance model that a public sector organisation adopt. Resultant from this application of these binding and non-binding legal instruments, governance models are identified namely coercion, voluntarism, targeting, and framework regulation (Monteiro, 2014:206) and briefly reflected on.

The first governance model of coercion entails legal tools that are binding such as decisions, regulations and directives and of which its implementation is of a highly standardized nature (Monteiro,

2014:206; Weber, 2002:624). On the opposite continuum of coercion the second governance model namely voluntarism encompasses the use of instruments that are non-binding viz recommendations, conclusions and declarations, as well as broad goals that are adjusted per case (Monteiro, 2014:206). The third governance model namely targeting entails non-binding instruments such as recommendations of which implementation is less flexible (Monteiro, 2014:206). Lastly, the fourth governance model of framework regulation results in the presentation of binding tools and how these can be fulfilled through ideal goals or other divergent conducts (Monteiro, 2014:206; Brunet and Aubry, 2016:1598). An analysis of the respective governance models implies that the model adopted by the public sector organisation will (i) determine whether citizens participate in the governance of service delivery, and (ii) whether citizen participation in the governance of service delivery would be limited to sharing responsibilities or also include the sharing of power. Meaning that a governance model could (i) exclusively allow governing by government without sharing decision-making power and processes with citizens (consistent with traditional PA and governance), (ii) allow governance without government involvement (consistent with forms of NPM), or (iii) allow sharing of governance between government and citizens (consistent with forms of new public governance).

Adding to the aforementioned, governance models appear to present risks as well as benefits. The positivists attribute some of the benefits of governance models to self-organized networks culminating in enhanced participation of divergent social agents in governance (OECD, 2001a, 2001b; Kooiman, 2003; Kjaer, 2004; Wilson, 2008; Faguet, 2011 cited in Monteiro, 2014:206). Other benefits propositioned by the positivist is increased autonomy in local decision-making, and power distribution that is more balanced (OECD, 2001a, 2001b; Kooiman, 2003; Kjaer, 2004; Wilson, 2008; Faguet, 2011 cited in Monteiro, 2014:206). Opposing the positivists' views is a sentiment that some governance models amongst which governance occurring without government, weaken the abilities of government (Andrew and Goldsmith, 2011:107; Rhodes, 1996; Peters, 2002 cited in Monteiro, 2014:207). Conversely, the abilities of government could be weakened through governance models where power is shared with external actors. Hence, Getimis and Kafkalas (2002 cited in MacCallum et al., 2009:73) are of the view that the participation of non-governmental actors amongst which citizens during governance culminates in "shifting power relations".

A shift in power relations illustrates that the earlier contention of Rhodes (1996; Peters, 2002 cited in Monteiro, 2014:207) of government being weakened when governance occurs without government, also appears to be relevant to governance models where external actors become part of governance. MacCallum et al., (2009:74) therefore states that though governance occasionally sees the

development of new relationships between society and “the act of governing”, there are also counter tendencies that surface during these governance relations, which has the potential to weaken the ability of government. MacCallum et al. (2009:74) further cautions whilst new governance relations may see the presence of new societal actors as well as some rising to prominence, governance could also results in the continued exclusion of some societal actors, and the diminishing of the power position held by actors or groups that were part of “earlier forms of government.” The next section reflects on this power position as part of the power structure in the enigma of local governance.

## **2.2 POWER STRUCTURE**

Comeau (2004 cited in MacCallum et al, 2009:149) maintain that through the application of SI new power relations are developed. Power structure which is also referred to by some authors as the nature of authority that is wielded (Hyden, 1992, 2000 cited in Ratha and Mahapatra, 2013:4), is concerned with who influences decisions of local government (Rodríguez-García and Yáñez, 2016:128). To this effect Stone (1989; Imbroscio, 1998; Dowding, 2001 cited in Rodríguez-García and Yáñez, 2016:128), propose two factors that can be used to establish the influence that actors have in decisions. The first factor is what interest actors have in decisions, which implies that the level of salience a decision holds with an actor will determine his or her influence in the outcome of decisions. Inversely, it can be argued that it does not mean because a decision is of salience to a particular actor, the latter has power to influence the outcome of that decision. This might be the case for citizens for whom a service delivery decision holds salience, yet they do not hold adequate power to influence the outcome of the decision taken by government to be in their favour. This highlights that the salience of a decision for an actor for example citizens also determines the interest of an actor in decisions taken by local government. Meaning that if a decision will not have an impact on a citizen or citizens they may have no interest to participate in decision-making processes concerning it. Another contention to this is that though a decision might be of salience to citizens, they may have developed a lack of interest to participate due to losing confidence in the governance system.

The second factor relates to the informational, institutional and economic resources controlled by these actors to carry out decisions (Stone, 1989; Imbroscio, 1998; Dowding, 2001 cited in Rodríguez-García and Yáñez, 2016:128). From this, it can be deduced that those actors in whom the control of these resources are predominantly vested, would have more power to influence the outcome of government decisions. This assertion of control over resources could be the ability of citizens to influence decisions if they are not in a position to exert control over resources that local government might be dependent on. Owing to this, it would imply that those actors who do not hold power over resources to influence

government, will not be able to partake in governance or would have limited advantage to influence local government decisions. Then again, it does not explain the participation of citizens who may not be in a position of power in important local government decisions in some LG's, whether in respect of policy or service delivery decisions. Even if the position held by Stone (1989; Imbroscio, 1998; Dowding, 2001 cited in Rodríguez-García and Yáñez, 2016:128) seems to be true, this position concerning the control of resources does not appear to resonate in all local government settings. This highlights that control over resources is not the sole determining factor for citizen participation during local governance, nor does power alone determine participation in governance.

From the forgoing discussion it appears that a distinction can be made in terms of endogenous (internal) as well as exogenous (external) power structures. The power of citizens to influence decisions during local governance can be considered as part of an exogenous power structure, of which the latter might have the ability to exclude some citizens from participating in local governance of service delivery. Especially those citizens, who are marginalized, vulnerable, under represented, and who may not be in a position to exert influence over decisions during governance (MacCallum et al., 2009:74). Contrariwise, local governance also seem to be driven by an endogenous power structure the latter of which might be controlled by amongst other the PA style, decentralisation and governance models driving the public sector organisation. In hindsight, this endogenous power structure perhaps still holds absolute influence in the decision-making processes during local governance. This endogenous power structure might be part of the contributory causes for maintaining the status quo associated with traditional PA that excludes citizens and actors during service delivery decisions. It is therefore evident from the discussion that governance models and power structure likewise influence local governance and the extent to which citizens participate in the governance of service delivery. This in turn influences service delivery and evidently influences the use of SI as a tool in local government service delivery. The next section reflects on the local governance and SI nexus.

### **3. LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL INNOVATION NEXUS**

The preceding section, affirms that local governance would have an influence on the extent to which local government service delivery involves the use of SI. In this paper, the use of SI as a service delivery tool encompasses citizen participation during the planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of services through voice, choice, contribution and control. Social innovation, serves a dual purpose that comprises (i) finding solutions to societal problems (goal-oriented) but also (ii) building relationships and collaborations (process-oriented) in order to find such solutions (Sharra and Nyssens, 2010 cited in Chalmers, 2012:19; Grimm, Fox, Baines, and Albertson, 2013:438). This dual purpose of SI, is

considered as separate processes in the school of thought that view SI as being process-oriented (Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); (OECD, 2014:Online; Mulgan, 2006:146; Pol and Ville, 2009:881; Hart, Jacobs, Ramoroka, Mangqalazah, Mhula, Ngwenya and Letty, 2014:s.n), and the school of thought that claims SI is goal-oriented (Moulaert F., Martinelli, Swyngedouw and Gonza'lez, 2005 cited in MacCallum, Moulaert, Hillier, and Vicari Haddock, 2009:131). Notwithstanding that Sen (1999; Novy, 2002 cited in MacCallum, et al., 2009:131), cautions that the independent pursuit of these dual purposes (or dimensions as referred to by these authors) is detrimental to integrated development. Against this background, this paper views the process-oriented nature of SI as a governance arrangement to reconcile with the goal-oriented nature of SI.

The use of SI as a process results in collaborations, relations between government and citizens, self-organising amongst actors, social relations with the purpose to address societal problems, and new governance forms which together with participation and empowerment are the cornerstone of this nature of SI (Moulaert et al. 2005 cited in MacCallum, Moulaert, Hillier, and Vicari Haddock 2009:131). These governance relations alter the flow of authority with reference to the governance of services, which illustrates that governance is a fundamental element of SI. As much as this would point to an existing nexus between SI and local governance and the use of SI in the local governance of service delivery, it appears that this nexus is unexplored in empirical and theoretical work. The remainder of this section briefly explicates this nexus between local governance and the use of SI as a tool for service delivery.

In local government settings where responsibilities and powers are shared with amongst others citizens during service delivery, citizens are attributed with greater participatory roles in the governance of services, which rearticulate the construct of the citizen-government relationship (Moulaert et al., 2005:1976; Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2013:3). The use of SI as a service delivery tool appears to attribute citizens with similar participatory roles, increased power, and allow citizens to exercise influence over the outcome of service delivery decision-making processes. Thus, SI could be considered as a strategy that exogenous power structures could use to influence local governance. Further, SI potentially culminates in new governance arrangements and decision-making systems (Westley and Antadze, n.d:3; MacCallum et al., 2009:12), which denotes its use an open process that allow end-user participation in designing and developing public services (Chesbrough, 2003; Silva and Bucek, 2014; Von Hippel, 2007 cited in *Merickova et al.*, 2015:522). Moreso the governance capacity of citizens become enhanced (European Commission, 2011:3 cited in Voorberg et al, 2013:3), and

Moulaert et al., (2005:1976), note particularly the increased participation of societal groups that are deprived as result of governance relations.

Given the participation of citizens during the use of SI, it could be deduced that SI is congruent with open governance systems. Further, Lévesque (2012:34) contend that the use of innovation by public sector organisations should either contribute to creating public value or result in its improvement. To this effect, Moore and Hartley (2008:15) are of the view that innovations are successful when its use alters the social condition underpinning the collective concern, and not necessarily its success in increasing an organisation's productivity. Therefore, the use of SI during service delivery could evidently result in the creation of public value, which makes it a fundamental element to the use of SI together with citizen participation. Likewise, citizen participation and the creation of public value also appears to be fundamental concepts during local governance of services. As such, the use of SI necessitates a governance system that is open to citizen participation in decision-making processes concerning service delivery. Against the background of the discussion regarding the enigma of local governance and the local governance and SI nexus, the next section, presents the case of the City of Ghent in terms of what might be the influence of local governance system on the use of SI as a tool for service delivery.

#### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research design with a single case design was applied in this case. The nature of the research question warranted a holistic understanding of the phenomenon instead of measuring it of which this understanding is consistent with qualitative research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:50). The relevance of the case study approach for qualitative research is vested in the fact that the phenomenon is explored in its context through multiple data collection techniques and multiple perspectives (Creswell, 1998; Hakim, 2000; Holloway and Wheeler, 1996; Robson, 2002; Yin, 1993, 1994 cited in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:52).

##### **Population and sample size**

Citizens and representative structures from three wards namely Stationsbuurt Noord, Gentbrugge and Lederberg participated in this study. The selection of the population (N) for this case was premised on their geographical location, and was of purpose in being able to inform and illuminate understanding relative to the research question, and this feature served as the criterion for their selection. This population (N) comprised of local government officials, a local government politician, ward citizens in the City of Ghent, and an academic, because a single perspective of the phenomenon was not suffice.



However, although attempts were made to obtain a political perspective, the aforementioned was not available to participate in the study. The selection of the sample (n) as illustrated in Table 1, was made by applying the non-probability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling.

**Table 1: Data Collection and sample**

<b>Data collection instrument</b>	<b>n</b>
Semi-structured interview x 1: Strategic Director	Local government official
Semi-structured interviews x 1: Ward Director	Local government official
Semi-structured interview x 1: Policy participation	Local government official
Structured interview x 1	Academic
Focus group x 2	Citizens
Focus group x 1	Local government officials

### **Data analysis**

The analysis of data obtained through structured and semi-structured interviews as well as the focus groups were done through three stages viz (i) data management, (ii) descriptive accounts and (iii) explanatory accounts. Data management (stage one), which was done manually, involved transcribing the data from the audio recordings as well as the notes that were taken by the researcher during data collection. The transcribed data formed the basis of further analysis, which entailed labelling the data according to themes under which the sorting and summarising of the data occurred per theme. Summarising of the data entailed contemplating the relevance and meaning of data to the phenomenon under enquiry. During stage two, the summarised data from stage 1 was used to formulate descriptive accounts. As proposed by Ritchie and Lewis (2003:214) these descriptive accounts entailed (i) using the actual words of respondents to grasp how respondents' comprehend and perceive the phenomenon, and (ii) the fundamental content of the respondent's accounts in respect of assigned meanings and descriptions. The explanatory account entailed explaining why the data assumed a specific form, highlighting the occurrence of patterns and why certain patterns occurred, as well as highlighting why certain linkages and contradictions could be found in the data. Through the use of the analytic hierarchy as the strategy to analyse the qualitative data, "patterns, recurring linkages, associations", and inconsistencies were identified.

### **Reliability and validity**

During qualitative research, ensuring that the data collection techniques are reliable pertains more to the dependability and consistency of the data collection process than replicability (Creswell, 2007:204; Zohrabi, 2013:259). In the research design for this study, multiple data collection techniques were used such as documents, structure and semi-structured interviews, as well as focus groups to facilitate

dependability. As for the consistent use of the data collection process the intention was not to replicate research results but rather on the consistent application of the data collection processes such as the structured and semi-structured interviews and focus groups within the research design. Concerning validity, Forman et al. (2008:768) propose that the validity of qualitative data can be attained through (i) methodological rigour, the latter, which Anney (2014:276) refer to as credibility, and (ii) relevance of the findings as discussed in the succeeding paragraph. Methodological rigour was secured through the identification of the appropriate research design namely the qualitative research design to address the research question. Within this qualitative research design, purposive sampling was used for the sample design and selection towards addressing the research question.

The relevance of the findings from the data analysis was supported through triangulation, the latter of which in this study was ensured through the multiple use of data collection techniques namely documents (naturally occurring data), semi-structured and structured interviews and focus groups (generated data). Data triangulation was achieved by cross-checking sources of data to ascertain if convergence exist between the evidence from the multiple data collection techniques. In addition to data triangulation, interpretation of the findings entailed integration of the different sources of qualitative data to ensure the internal validity and to enhance its trustworthiness. The multiple data collection techniques aided in strengthening the validity of the findings since the phenomenon was explored through different qualitative data collection methods.

## **5. CASE OF THE CITY OF GHENT**

The City of Ghent is a local government authority in the East Flanders province of Belgium with a population of 252273 citizens who are spread across 25 wards (Stad Gent, 2016c:3). The City council which comprise of 51 councillors, serves as the representative body of the citizenry since they are directly elected by them (Stad Gent, 2016a:Online). Together with this council, an Executive Committee is responsible for the implementation of the city's policy and budgetary frameworks (Stad Gent, 2016b:Online). The Executive Committee is the City council's main decision-making body and is made up of the eleven executive councillors, the Mayor, the City Manager and the deputy manager (Stad Gent, 2016b:Online). Although the eleven executive councillors are respectively responsible for a particular focus within the Council's policies and services, they do not have decision-making authority separate from the council and can only take decisions as a collective (Stad Gent, 2016b:Online). The term of the current Executive Committee is from 2013 when the last council was elected until 2018 when a new Executive Committee will be selected (Stad Gent, 2016b:Online). In respect of the

administration of the City of Ghent, it has nine directorates that are made up of smaller departments (Stad Gent, 2015:Online).

The formal picture concerning the use of SI as a service delivery tool by the City of Ghent denotes support at a political level. At a strategic level within the administration, efforts are embarked on to stimulate the use of SI as a service delivery tool, and at an operational level, its use by the administration is of an inconsistent nature. Further, the use of SI as a service delivery tool in this case appears to be consistent with how this concept is defined in the context of this paper (section three) but lags in the areas of citizen participation in the planning and evaluation of services. With reference to the City of Ghent's governance system, the latter appears to be partially consistent with regard to citizen participation in decision-making processes concerning service delivery through shared responsibilities, but lags in respect of citizen participation in the regulation of services through shared powers. The governance system facilitates citizen participation through direct and indirect participation at a micro-level (ward-level), and through indirect participation at a macro-level. Adding to this the City's governance system appears to be a combination of the governance models viz coercion, voluntarism as well as framework regulation. Consistent with how literature denotes local governance (Löffler, 2005: 169 cited in Öktem, 2014:753), the City attempts to increase service user satisfaction, and aims to empower citizens to manage their own affairs by involving them in service delivery planning.

## **5.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **▪ Citizens participation in decision-making processes regarding service delivery**

The findings highlight that officials consider citizen participation in service delivery decision-making processes as important. The realisation by the CoG administration of the obligation on them as government to create an opportunity for all citizens to participate in decision-making processes, as well as the financial resources spent on communication and the human resources to elicit citizen participation affirms this. Hence, the concern for inclusive citizen participation in terms of reaching all citizens, as well as avoiding the exclusion some citizens. Contrary to this however, the concern amongst some officials that citizen participation in decision-making processes may prolong the taking of decisions, and result in dedicating more financial and human resources to such processes, highlights the impact of citizen participation in governance processes.

The findings point out that although the administration undertake efforts towards citizen participation in service delivery decision-making processes, there are citizens who do not make use of such opportunities. Though it is not clear why some citizens do not participate, reasons could be that

participation opportunities are not appealing or accessible to the participants and other citizens. Even so, citizens have a contrary view that most decisions are taken by the CoG. It also appears that citizen participation in decision-making is not consistently applied to all services and that citizens are not always consulted. This could in part be attributed to the distinction between citizen participation at a ward level (micro) and City level (macro). Yet the inconsistent participation of citizens in decision-making also occurs at a ward level, and is not exclusive to the City level. In addition to this, the findings highlight that the administration, as well as the academic regard politicians as important representatives of citizen input in decision-making concerning the strategic choices of the CoG. This view could in part also be attributed to the lack of citizen participation in decision-making at a micro and macro level, and as such seems to influence citizen participation in decision-making regarding service delivery.

In the event where citizens participate in service delivery decision making processes, the findings point out that this occurs prior to the delivery of some services such as planning and designing services, during the delivery of some services as well as to evaluate services. The nature of citizen participation in these services involves co-planning a service, co-designing a service, co-delivery as well as co-evaluation of services. Though this participation of citizens in the services delivery stages seems to occur, it is not applied to all services. It also appears that citizen participation in all the stages of the service delivery cycle for a particular service does not necessarily occur. On the other hand the participation of citizens in these service delivery stages indicates that the service delivery practices of the City resonates with contemporary forms of PA and governance styles as well as SI. Noteworthy, about this participation of citizens in decision-making processes during the respective stages of the service delivery cycle is that this practice is not applied to the development of the 6-year Multi-annual plan of the City. The type of citizen participation during the respective stages of the service delivery cycle is more reserved to individual service delivery projects.

- **Compatibility of social innovation as service delivery tool with the City of Ghent's governance system**

The findings highlight that the CoG has no choice anymore but to use SI in LG service delivery. At the same time, it can be noted that working with citizens or civil society in the Flemish Belgium political system is not new but "has been the basic tradition of LG". Hence, the process of governance appears to have been transformed to new forms of governance, with "the ambition and necessity or the political culture" to work with citizens and civil society organisations "by looking for a duopoly" and not to build

“up a monopoly in the public sector”. Therefore, although the type of civil society organisations and the type of problems change, the interaction with these organisations are not new to the CoG.

Even though one of the participant's reasoned that the governance system of the CoG is open to the use of SI during service delivery, and working with citizens, it appears that in the CoGs local governance system citizen participation in terms of decision-making does not take precedence. In this regard, it was reported that citizen participation does not occur prior to the development of the 6-year multi-annual plan (macro level) or even at a ward level (micro level). Whilst some departments in the CoG administration build service delivery on interaction with citizens through SI, all departments do not consistently apply this. It could therefore be argued that a LG system that is compatible with the use of SI would consistently apply the use of SI during service delivery. On the other hand, it could also be argued that this indicates the City's governance system contain aspects of compatibility with the use of SI in service delivery. In addition to this, if citizen participation is regarded as central to the use of SI in service delivery, the findings illustrated that citizens are not always consulted or participate in service delivery decision-making processes.

Further, some of the respondent's held the view that political representation serves as a legitimate basis to take decisions on behalf of citizens. In fact, some officials regard political representation as suffice in respect of citizen participation, which reduce SI to an irrelevant process to service delivery. Nonetheless, although it appears that the CoGs local governance system is less open to citizen participation in service delivery decision-making processes, it does appear that the local governance is more open to citizen participation in the delivery of services. This leans towards a local governance system where responsibilities are shared with citizens but power in respect decision-making is still dominated by either the CoGs administration or politicians.

#### ▪ **Use of social innovation as service delivery tool by the administration**

The findings highlights that the administration has the liberty to use SI during service delivery. This use of SI by the administration is however not because the governance system obliges them to do so. Further, the findings point out that there is an inconsistent use of SI amongst service departments, which could be attributed to the fact that the governance system does not completely promote the use of SI as a service delivery tool by the administration. Conversely the findings also highlights that the extent to which the administration use SI is not necessarily determined by the governance system of the CoG, but more determined at a departmental level by Heads of Departments and Directors. This once again shows that the governance system does have an influence on the use of SI by the

administration. It appears that its governance system does not necessarily deter the use of SI by the administration but the fact that the use of SI is not consciously entrenched in the governance system could be a deterrent to its use. Inversely although SI is not consciously entrenched in the City's governance system the latter appears to be open to the use of SI by the administration.

## **6. LESSONS LEARNT**

This section offers lesson learnt from the case of Ghent in respect of significant aspects regarding the enigma of local governance systems and the use of SI as service delivery tool as highlighted by the findings.

### **Local governance and SI as strategy for inclusive citizen participation in service delivery**

The case of Ghent illustrated that a local governance system is important in facilitating inclusive citizen participation in decision-making processes concerning service delivery. Further, the use of SI during service delivery could aid as a strategy that facilitates such inclusive citizen participation in local governance. The local governance and SI nexus provides substantiation in this regard which highlighted citizen participation and the creation of public value as fundamental to both. In this case, some citizens were excluded from participating in decision-making processes concerning service delivery in general and even when SI is used, which highlights the need for inclusive participation during the governance of service delivery. The fact that SI is not entrenched in the City's local governance system could be part of the contributory causes for the lack of inclusive participation in decision-making processes regarding service delivery.

Ghent highlighted that inclusive citizen participation in local governance is costly and labour intensive for any local government and could result in prolonged decision-making processes. Thus besides the benefits that citizen participation in local governance yield for service delivery, cognisance should be taken of the fact that it could have implications for the timeous reaching of goals, targets and the implementation of service delivery priorities. Adding to this inclusive citizen participation in local governance require innovative approaches that advance the participation of those citizens that are currently excluded whilst as the same time retaining existing participants. In doing this, local government should look at strategies that foster a culture of participation in service delivery decision-making processes amongst citizens that makes them aware of the importance of their participation for creating public value for the collective interest. The case of Ghent has demonstrated that a similar culture that sensitizes officials of the importance of citizen participation in decision-making processes is required as part of its internal organisational context. This is evident from the need for the bureaucratic

systems to be aligned with the local governance system, and for the adaptation of systems and processes in order to facilitate inclusive citizen participation. The CoG is reported to have a local governance system that is open to citizen participation in decision-making processes, yet the findings highlight that the implementation thereof by the administration is inconsistent. Although factors such as the absence of an explicit SI strategy may be part of the contributory reasons for this inconsistent practice by the administration, the case of Ghent teaches us that the local governance system has a definitive impact on the work practices of the administration. Hence, these work practices which are influenced by the internal organisational context, will either enhance or deter the use of SI by the administration.

### **Social innovation as service delivery tool to facilitate citizen participation in local governance**

The literature illustrated that SI has the potential to facilitate citizen participation in service delivery decision-making processes, but does SI fully empower citizens as partners in local governance. The case of Ghent shows that the use of SI to facilitate citizen participation in local governance does not automatically make citizens equal partners to local government in the absence of shared power. Further, although some citizens participated in co-planning, co-design, co-delivery and co-evaluation of some services during the use of SI, their participation was not always during the initial stages of fundamental decision-making processes (at a macro-level or micro-level), the latter of which could present opportunities for the sharing of decision-making power. The participation of citizens during these service delivery stages entailed them being attributed with functions, responsibilities and resources to implement service delivery. Ghent therefore highlights the use of SI as a tool to address aspects of local governance during service delivery. Even though citizens did not participate in decision-making processes that prioritises service delivery in the Multi-annual plan (macro-level) of the CoG, their participation in the co-planning, co-design, co-delivery and co-evaluation of some services (micro-level) is still equivalent to participation in the local governance of services. Their participation however does not automatically make them equal partners to local government during local governance.

### **Compatibility of social innovation with local governance systems**

Whilst local governance systems have a definitive influence on the use of SI in service delivery, literature pointed out that SI could be compatible with open governance systems. In the case of Ghent, although officials regard the local governance system as being open it does not appear to be completely consistent with how open governance systems are considered in the theoretical framework



for this study. Nevertheless, SI was still used by the administration and initiated by citizens and the administration during service delivery. This case thus illustrated that even when a local governance system is closed, it does not completely deter the use of SI by its administration. Likewise, this case demonstrated that although the local governance system appears to be incompatible with the use of SI during service delivery; it does not mean the use of SI will not occur. At the same time, what can be deduced from this case is that even when the governance system is open to citizen participation in service delivery decision-making processes, this does not mean that the local governance system is compatible with the use of SI in its totality. As found in Ghent, it could imply that the local governance system is compatible with selected aspects of using SI as a tool for service delivery that might fit existing service delivery practices. In addition to this, the CoG demonstrated that a local governance system that is open could imply the sharing of service delivery responsibilities between the administration and citizens but excluding the sharing of decision-making powers in respect of service delivery.

### **Exogenous and endogenous power structures in local governance**

The literature emphasized that the outcome of decision-making processes during local governance appears to be influenced by those having the power to influence decisions (Rodríguez-García and Yáñez, 2016:128). In this regard, this paper categorized these power structures in terms of exogenous and endogenous power structures. Ghent illustrated the presence of both endogenous and exogenous power structures and that both influences the outcomes of service delivery decision-making processes. The findings highlighted that even though citizens as part of the exogenous power structure influenced the outcome of some service delivery decision-making processes, the endogenous power structure (City of Ghent) retained the final say in most decisions. This final say appears to be consistent with the lack of adequate power being attributed to external actors. Nevertheless, within these power structures, two factors are deemed important to determine the influence of actors in decision-making processes.

The first factor pointed out by literature is the salience that decisions would hold for actors and the second factor being the informational, institutional, and economic resources controlled by actors that could be used to influence the outcome of decisions (Rodríguez-García and Yáñez, 2016:128). The findings showed that citizens participated in service delivery decision-making processes because of the salience of the decisions to their individual as well as collective interests. What can be learnt from Ghent is that citizen participation was not influenced by whether citizens had resources to influence the outcome of decisions. Similarly, this case has proven that even when citizens did not have any resources to influence the outcome of decisions, they could still influence the outcome of decision-

making processes. However, this may be unique to Ghent and does not infer that the ability of citizens to influence the outcome of decision-making processes would be the same in other local government settings. Ghent likewise illustrated that even though citizens had the opportunity to influence decision-making processes, some did not make use of such opportunities even when the decision(s) were of salience for them. What can be learnt in respect of exogenous and endogenous power structures is that control over resources is not the sole determining factor for citizen participation during local governance, nor does salience of decisions imply that citizens will participate in service delivery decision-making processes during local governance.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

An outcome of this paper is the identification of exogenous and endogenous power structures that influences the outcome of service delivery decision-making processes during local governance, which positions SI as a strategy within the realm of exogenous power structures to influence the outcome of LG's decisions. This paper illustrated how the use of SI as a tool for local government service delivery might be influenced by local governance systems. Hence the research question posed by this paper was: how local governance systems might influence the use of SI as a tool for local government service delivery? This question was answered by exploring the enigma of local governance, and the local governance and SI nexus as part of the theoretical background to this paper, measuring the research question in the case of Ghent, and drawing on lessons learnt from this case.

The literature illustrated that a definitive relationship exists between local governance systems and the use of SI as a service delivery tool. This definitive relationship was affirmed in the case of Ghent yet the findings demonstrated that the use of SI is not necessarily associated with open governance systems. Conversely, this case illustrated that a closed governance system does not inhibit the use of SI by the administration. The findings may however be different in another local government setting, and research that is more extensive is required to delineate how local governance systems influence the use of SI as a tool for service delivery. Such research would be useful towards the PA and SI discourses as well as for local government practitioners.

The lessons learnt highlights that the enigma regarding local governance systems and SI as a tool for service delivery is even more complex, and require further exploration beyond the scope of this paper. Similar research as conducted in this case is therefore undertaken in another local government setting as part of a broader qualitative comparative research design. Against the background of this case, local government should be cautious that the use of SI as service delivery tool do not weaken government's

abilities, due to external actors pursuing individual interests opposed to collective interests that create public value, and because officials start to feel that their professional opinion and skills is no longer of value.

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